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# Drawing from Strength

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Drawing from Strength

A Senior Honors Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for Graduation in the Honors College

By:  
Audrey Miller

Studio Art and Arts for Children Double Major, Psychology Minor

State University of New York – The College at Brockport

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Thesis Director: Sara Didonato, Associate Professor of Art, Painting

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students a model example of an Honors senior thesis project.*

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## Introduction

I have been an athlete almost my entire life. Over many years of competition, my passions as an athlete and competitor have become major influences in my artwork. This body of work has stemmed from a two-year progression of work depicting runners. During this period of capturing the different aspects of running, I discovered that I was mostly drawn to how the female athletic form was represented. I loved exaggerating the physique of the runners I painted with deep contrasts in the highlights and shadows of the muscles.

After I had become a successful field athlete, I was running less and less until ultimately I no longer considered myself a runner. This change shifted my interest in painting only runners to painting a wider set of athletes, and focusing mainly on the athletic female figure.

My two greatest inspirations in creating this body of work are classical sculpture, such as Michelangelo's *David*, and superhero comics. In classical sculpture, I have always been impressed by the simplicity of the white marble sculpture, the larger than life size, and the shadows in the muscles. I loved that in these sculptures, the artist was giving us an idealized, heroic male specimen. It fascinated me that the sculptures were nude, but they weren't sexualized or humiliating. They were there to demonstrate the beauty of a hero. As for superhero comics, I've always been impressed by the graphic quality and the line work used by the illustrators. The precise lines are critical in sculpting, highlighting, and exaggerating the characters' muscles. Most importantly, these characters are strong, heroic, and dynamic.

I have created a body of work combining my favorite elements of sculpture and comics celebrating the female athletic body. They look strong and heroic, like the idealized Greek sculptures and the fantastic comic book characters that we love. I chose to use black and white for its contrast and because the classical sculptures I am inspired by are devoid of color. My

work serves as a feminist perspective on the male dominated art history we all know. I am showing off the strength, power, and resilience of the female body.

### **Background**

My body of work entitled *Drawing from Strength* stems from a lifelong interest in sport, the evolution of my work over a three-year timeframe, and various artistic influences such as classical sculpture and comic book illustrations. My work also stands to depict the female nude in a different light than it is traditionally painted under. *Drawing from Strength* is the culmination of my evolution as an artist at The College at Brockport. Without the work that came before, I would not have been able to develop my work into what it has become. For that reason, it is necessary to analyze my earlier works in the past few years. This will show a development of ideas and it will tell a story about how I evolved from wanting to paint realistic portraits to painting large scale, stylized, figurative pieces. My artistic inspirations over the past few years have informed my work and helped me to work in a way that helped me enjoy painting and love the finished results.



**Figure 1: Drawing from Strength**

I've been an athlete for my entire life and that is the label I've identified myself with for as long as I can remember. I grew up playing softball and running track and cross-country as

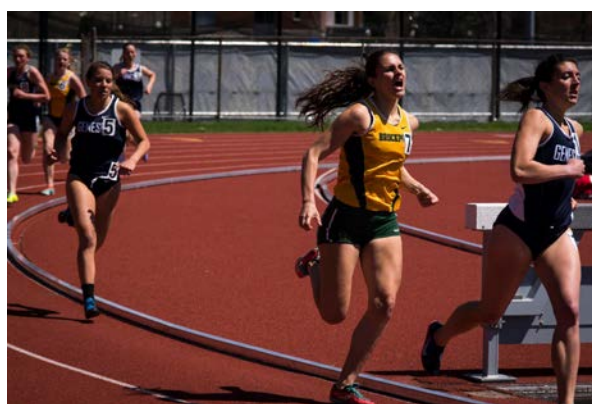
soon as I could be signed up for a team. I always got the most enjoyment and meaning in life through my athletic experiences and accomplishments. Because sports are such an important part of my life and identity, naturally when it comes to art, I am most inspired by these athletic experiences.

When I was in eighth grade, I was good enough at cross-country to be the best on my small team and qualify for my league's championship meet. I wound up placing top ten and receiving a medal for this accomplishment. I have photos of myself beaming with my top-ten medal and I look so proud. I also have pictures of myself during the race itself. There is one photo that I love so much during this race. In this photo, I am in front of a girl in a red uniform. The girl in red behind me is coming up on my tail during the final straightaway of the race and the photo captures my nervous expression as I look back over my shoulder at her. This moment is so crazy to me because it represents a feeling I've experienced so many times in my life being an athlete. This feeling is one where the rest of the world disappears and all that matters is the moment you are in. During that moment, everything else slips away. I was not worried about my grades. I was not worried about what friends I wanted to hang out with that weekend. I was not worried about the dining room window I broke with a golf ball the week before. I was only concerned about running as fast as I could and beating the girl behind me. Another funny thing about this picture is the girl in red's hair. It's been cheaply sprayed with some type of red hair paint to match her uniform. This is amusing to me because she doesn't care how silly she looks with her red hair. To her, that represents her team spirit and dedication and she is there for the same reason I am. She wants to beat me as much as I want to beat her. Her brain is probably functioning in the same way as mine in every way. Keep in mind again, this is the final straightaway of the race and so there are people cheering for the finish. We hear no names, only

a volume of voices cheering loudly and so that makes this moment of racing each other so much more intense in our minds. This feeling of only existing in the present moment is a feeling that I was interested in capturing in many of my pieces leading up to my present work.



**Figure 2: Audrey looking over shoulder at competitor**



**Figure 3: Audrey screaming as she passes competitor**

Another photo that has really inspired my creative process is above. This photo, like the one of me as a child, captures me in the moment during competition. Similarly, I have someone I am trying to pass in the race. I have also let go of all my other worries in this photo. Even though I am a college girl with school, a job, a future, and other daily stressors weighing me down, in this moment, none of those thoughts crossed my mind. I was in that race for myself, to improve my times, and to push myself as hard as I could to run as well as possible. I am no Olympic runner here, but I am passionate and full of adrenaline. Aside from the moment that this photograph captures, I really love the intensity of the look on my face. When I was a runner, sometimes I would scream out during the final moments of my races and this photo is capturing me as I let out a roar of pure aggression. This scream was channeling my inner strength and ignoring all the voices in my head telling me that my body hurt. I was screaming to get myself through the end of the race and to finish hard. In addition to the facial expression, I love how the lighting captures the rippling of the muscles in my arms and legs. Whenever I look at this

picture, I relive this moment of the race in my head. I feel strong because of how my body looks, passionate because of my facial expression, and overall I feel powerful because I feel how loud my presence is. Because of how this photo inspired me, I used it as reference in one of my first paintings about running. I wanted to capture the facial expression because of its intensity and how much the photo meant to me. Even though I originally referenced this picture for my facial expression, little did I know, it was the body propelling me forward that would later interest and inspire me.

### **Beginning Work and Evolution**

For two years I created paintings based on runners and different aspects of running. I didn't like the stereotype that running is like flying free with birds and it's a great pastime. I wanted to show people that to me and many other runners, running is painful and gritty. I wanted to take my own knowledge and feelings about running and apply them visually. I had been running since the age of seven and throughout the years, I always got the questions, "Why do you run?" or "Why do you like running?" As a collegiate long- and mid- distance runner, a large portion of my training consisted of long or easy runs. The range of distance that I went at a time could vary from 3 to 14 miles and running these distances alone could be incredibly painful, so I was thankful that I had around 20 teammates to choose from to go on runs with. Naturally, I have had thousands of conversations with people who run competitively like I did. The answers to the questions above are never straightforward, and sometimes it is impossible to think of an answer. Even depending on the day, the same individual could have a different answer. When answering the questions above, I realized that the relationship I had with running was a complicated love-hate one. I have spoken to non-runners about running, and the images they describe from their



heads are always so much different than the images I saw in my own. I remember speaking to someone at one point about ideas for paintings about running and some of what she described included frolicking around with deer and birds. I listened to her ideas but something just didn't seem right. The images in my head were grueling, painful, sweaty, dark, and straight-out aggressive. I wanted my paintings to express the complicated and painful relationship I had with running.

I wanted to capture and bring out the emotions and feelings. I didn't exactly want my paintings to be bright and colorful. To me, that would express the freeing side of running. I wanted to bring a different perspective to the table. I wanted to show running as something competitive and not enjoyable. When people talked to me about running, yes it was something I love, but it is also something that brings pain. Not every run feels like you are floating on air. Sometimes there are days where you don't want to run, days that running will hurt every mile, and sometimes you will stop mid-run 5 miles away from home because you are bored out of your mind. Even through the monotony of the sport, the love of the competition and the emotions I felt during that adrenaline rush really pushed me through and kept me running because they were so rewarding.



**Figure 4: *Focus*, Oil on Canvas, 14 x 11"**



**Figure 5: *Passion*, Oil on Canvas, 14 x 11"**

The pieces above were my first pieces capturing the facial expressions of runners in competition. I was trying to portray these moments realistically with still portraits capturing their emotions. The leftmost figure, *Focus*, is a painting of a runner that I admired for her composure and deep focus when she raced. I kept the colors subdued to emphasize her calmness and poise as she competed. The rightmost figure, *Passion*, is one based on the photo I talked about in my introduction. I painted this one alongside *Focus*. The subject matter is the same, the facial expression of a runner, but the depiction is so different. In *Passion*, I chose a more aggressive expression and I played it up so that the colors were very saturated and intense. This added to the intensity of the moment and the aggression of the scream that I am letting out. The backgrounds of each serve their own purpose as well. *Focus*'s background is plain grey to represent a calculative mind that is not phased by its current situation. *Passion*'s background is expressive and rippled to represent the scream and the activity in the brain with an adrenaline rush. However, in both backgrounds I chose not to add anything else to the composition. Both paintings have empty backgrounds to represent that moment in which you disappear from the rest of the world and all that matters is yourself and performing to the best of your ability.

When looking at both *Focus* and *Passion*, notice how dark I made the shadows in the neck and ears. Although I thought I wanted to work with facial expressions, I was actually more interested in the shadows of the body and I really wanted to push the contrast there to exaggerate that. Because I was so interested in the shadows and highlights in the body, I started including more of the figure in my work with facial expression. In *Zone*, pictured below, I was still capturing the emotion of the runner, but I was also very focused on the type of headspace that a runner goes into while in competition. Having an abstract background and making the figure separate from the background helped to convey this headspace. I created a very distinct

separation between the figure and the background by making the figure a brownish orange and making the background a bright blue. This is effective because orange and blue are complementary colors, so they contrast, and one makes the other pop. In the background, I used drip and splatter techniques. I liked utilizing these techniques because the application is more active than just using brushstrokes. It was more enjoyable for me to use big movements with my arms. I liked how they look and the drips were referencing the sweat and tears that go into hard work and competing. When I was done with the background, it was time to paint the face and the body. Around this time, I started playing around with unfinished faces in my paintings. This was interesting to me because it made the person less specific. Unfinished faces are so important to me because the actions of my figures are already so specific. In my older work, by removing the face, it made the painting less about one single runner in one single moment and more about runners in general and the moments they experience in competition. In my newer work, by making the faces into generalized shapes that only resemble their references, this makes the work about strong women in general rather than only about the single strong woman who posed for the reference photograph.

As I was painting the figure, my favorite parts were the muscles and contours of the body. I really liked exaggerating the muscles, but I realized that I was making the shadows too dark and so the body looked very unrealistic. I decided to go back into the muscles and ease up on the contrast a little bit. Looking at the painting, you can see how dark the shadows are, so just imagine how dark they were before I went back in and made them lighter. At this time, my love for bodies and strong muscles was subconscious, but it was being expressed in how I painted my figures.



**Figure 6: *Zone*, Oil on Canvas, 24 x 18"**



**Figure 7: *Process*, Oil on Wood, 48 x 36"**

This next painting, *Process*, is about my attempts to fuse the processes of running and painting. Both are skills that involve a long process of preparation and improvement through hard work and determination. Through this piece, I was telling a story about how I was building on a base in both running and painting. I used the first picture of me looking back at the girl in red as reference for this painting because I wanted to repeat myself over and over again so that I would be looking back at myself in the painting. This is an important idea because in anything, you really only compete against yourself to measure your improvement and successes. In competition, you can look back at your preparation leading up to the big event and ultimately, what you did in preparation is what you could have controlled the most and will determine how well you do.

I consider this piece a real turning point in my body of art. In *Process*, I really liked showing off the flat sketch that is underneath all my figures. By flat, I mean more graphic and without the modeling and shading that the second and third figures have. I was doing some experimentation with the unfinished quality of the work and in this piece, more of the body was part of what I was painting. At this time, I didn't realize it, but I liked working in a more flat and illustrative quality, and I liked giving outlines to my figures. Therefore, I was happy that in this

piece, I gave myself a “reason” to work in this way, even if it was only in the first and part of the second figures.

The last two most important works in my artistic progression are *Intensity* and *Steeple*. In *Intensity*, I moved totally away from faces to focus on the body, more specifically the legs. In this piece, the colors are very expressive, something that would not carry on to my final exhibition of work, but the colors I used contrasted highly with each other to make a very dramatic painting. I was very interested in capturing motion with this piece. To capture motion, I chose an active running position and I used graphic lines to contour the muscles, exaggerate them, and draw motion lines.



Figure 8: *Intensity*, Acrylic on Wood, 24 x 48"

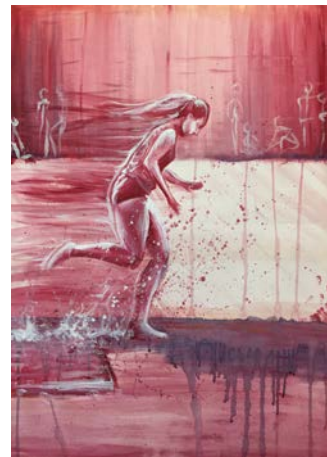


Figure 9: *Steeple*, Acrylic on Paper, 20 x 36"

In *Steeple*, I was working with a monochromatic color palette. I've always liked working monochromatically and with unnatural colors because I like seeing the contrast I can create within one color. In this piece, I really incorporated the whole body into the piece and I chose a reference photo with a very specific light source so that I could show dramatic highlights on the body. This piece really integrates some very important elements, including use of the full female figure, monochromatic color, and dramatic highlights and shadows on the body, that I wound up carrying through to my final body of work.

## Inspirations

As I was exploring the world of sport in art, I really wanted to find artists who depicted the athlete with a great deal of energy and movement. I stumbled upon Leroy Neiman and I have been influenced greatly by him. He helped me to find a starting point because I was so inspired by his expressive use of color and the dynamic poses he put his athletes in. I used this work of his to help inform my work about runners.



Figure 10: Leroy Neiman, *Michael Jordan*, 26 x 33"

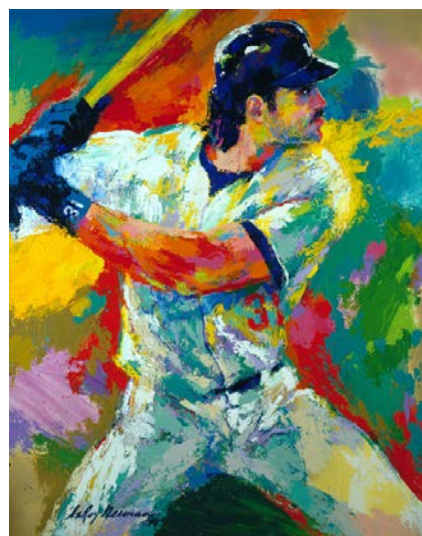


Figure 11: Leroy Neiman, *Mike Piazza*, 29 ½ x 37"

As I was creating my pieces about runners, something happened to me that made me feel like I needed to change my focus. I started throwing javelin two years ago and this year I completely ended my running career to focus on learning other throwing events and getting stronger for javelin. This shift in my athletic focus caused me to have an identity crisis and I no longer knew what I wanted to do with my artwork. I didn't think I needed to completely cut running out of my artwork, but I needed to broaden my scope to be about more types of athletes. I started analyzing my old work, as I have done for you in this paper, and I realized many things about myself as an artist. I knew for a fact that I love seeing the female body represented in art. I

had subconsciously known this for a while, but I didn't know how to use that in my work. I started thinking about the different visual inspirations of mine. Instead of only focusing on artists that depict athletes, I broadened my scope so that I was thinking about outside influences that weren't directly about sport. The starting point for my new creative process stemmed from a love of classical sculpture.

Pieces such as Michelangelo's *David* and Myron's *Discobolus* have been really influential on me. I remember sitting in art history class as a freshman and being so fascinated by these sculptures. I've always been impressed by the simplicity of the white marble sculpture. The size of these sculptures is usually larger than life, which leaves such a strong visual impact. This size winds up making the figure look ten times as powerful. These men are sculpted out of marble so beautifully and the figures depicted are idealized in such a way that you have to look at them in awe. They are large and perfect, as if they were gods to be worshipped. The shadows in the muscles are so apparent on the smooth white marble. In these sculptures, the artist is giving us an idealized, perfect, strong, heroic, beautiful male specimen. The sculptures are nude, but not sexualized. In the earliest Olympic games, only the men competed and they competed in the nude. These men were showing off their athletic figures and they were not humiliated by this nudity; they were proud. These sculptures capture this idea of the heroic male athletic body.

When I was younger, I remember my mom coming home from the grocery store with a box of waffles. It was an Eggo box of blueberry waffles and it had a picture of Spiderman on the front. I remember these details specifically because I was so afraid to eat those waffles because for some reason, I thought that I would transform into the Spiderman on the box. The huge bulging muscles on his character really freaked me out. The idea of having those muscles was terrifying. It's funny though because what used to scare me so much inspires and fascinates me

today. This brings me to my next influence, comic book art. I never really got into reading comic books when I was younger, but today, I find them so fascinating. The panels and the action on every page are always so intense. I love how active and dynamic the works are and the poses that the artists come up with are great too. When you look at the way most comic books are shaded, you can see how the different shadows and highlights are broken up into different shapes instead of being blended realistically. There are crisp lines for all of the contours and highlights in the muscles of the characters. In comic book art, they even have graphic lines coming off the characters to represent motion and speed. This idea of capturing motion is something I was very interested in in my old work, so I thought maybe I would carry this idea of motion through in my new work as well.

Through these main two influences, I noticed that most of the figures and characters I admired were male. In our visual culture in general, most of the heroes are men. Because I've been so inspired by these strong heroic men, I wanted to take this idea of a hero and combine it with my favorite elements of my inspirations to make a body of work showing off the female body in a similar way.

One recent influence of mine that sparked some creativity in me was *Wonder Woman*, the movie that just came out. I was so impressed with the movie because of how strong and powerful Wonder Woman was depicted. Often times we find that female superheroes are very overly sexualized but when I watched this movie, I did not think that was the case. The lighting and the angles of the shots in the movie really did a great job at capturing the female warriors as powerful and strong. The directors used slow motion and other visual effects in such a way to enhance the intensity of Wonder Woman's dramatic kicks, flips, and other strong superhero moves.



The last, and most direct conceptual, influence of mine is ESPN's *Body Issue*. This issue of their magazine is filled with strong professional and Olympic athletes in the nude. The issue is made up of images of both male and female athletes whom I admire. These photographs are taken very artistically and tastefully. The athletes' bodies are lit in such a way to highlight their physiques and they are posed in interesting and dynamic poses. In every photo, the athletes are naked, but not in a sexual way at all. The images are entirely about what those bodies can do athletically. Some of the images in the magazine are posed statically, and some are taken in motion. With both types of images, the magazine gave me many ideas for posing the athletic nude body. I also directly referenced some images from the magazine.



**Figure 12: ESPN Body Issue, Amanda Bingson**

One of my favorite images from the shoot, above, is of Olympic hammer thrower Amanda Bingson. They took her and posed her from below as she looks down at us. This makes her look even more powerful and intimidating. The aim of this magazine is to show off the powerful bodies in sport, something that I also want to do in my work.

Overall from these influences, I drew the most from the idea of a heroic figure. I've always seen myself as strong and powerful, so I wanted to depict that in a body of work. Even if not every figure was of me, I see a bit of myself in each of the pieces. Because sculpture is large

and stands on its own, I decided that my figures were going to be large and cut out to impact the viewer almost as if they were sculptures. When people see my pieces, they will be impressed by the physiques of my women as well as their size. The scale will make the women intimidating and give them a powerful presence. I decided to use black, white, and grey in my pieces because the classical sculpture is only white, so this color scheme reminds me of that. Additionally, in comics, before the pictures are colored, they are black and white pieces of line work similar to my own paintings. Comic books really inspired my flat application of paint and my graphic use of line. In *Grit* and *Force*, I used partial figures but I cut them off with motion lines, similar to those I see in comic books. They are also cut off as if they were coming out of a comic book grid in a graphic novel. Overall, superhero comics are powerful, muscular, stylized, and dynamically posed, so I took those elements and figured out how to apply them in my own work.

### Style



Figure 13: *Bubbles*, Pen and Ink, 12 x 9"

This pen and ink drawing, *Bubbles*, is completely unrelated to my final body of work conceptually, but visually it has inspired me to go with the creative choice of only working in black and white. Through my pen and ink work, I have figured out that one of my greatest

artistic strengths is my ability to see and create contrast. I love the sharp lines in my pen and ink work and I love the pure contrast that can be achieved in black and white.

Once I knew what it was I liked about my most direct influences, I picked my favorite elements of each and fused them in my own way. I knew I wanted my pieces to be large and I knew I wanted them to be cut out. From there, I had to choose the style that my work would be.

To choose my style, I started doing some small figure studies in black and white because I've always liked the black and white pen and ink work that I do. It's some of my favorite work I do visually, so I wanted to find a way to bring my strengths from this work into my final body of work.

I started drawing out bodies and painting over them in black, white, and grey to figure out how I would apply the paint. I tried painting semi-realistically with blending and modeling, but I didn't like how those looked. I wanted something more graphic, like the comic books I am so inspired by. I started applying flat areas of paint and making defined shapes in my work to make the highlights and shadows in the bodies.

### **Process**

To begin my process, I chose the reference photo I like best. I chose from reference images of myself, women in fitness magazines, and Olympic athletes depicted in ESPN's *Body Issue*. When choosing my references, I picked based on the pose the woman is in and the lighting of the photographs. The pose is the most important part because I need to be able to make sure everything I draw is correct proportionally. Because my women get cut out of paper, it is important to make sure everything is in the right position before I cut it out. Once it is cut out, there is no going back. With a good reference photograph, I can measure limbs and other body

parts correctly in relationship to each other. Even if lighting isn't perfect, I can still look at other pictures for reference on where to add muscle contours and highlights.

The first two figures I completed were my "guardian" figures. After getting an accurate sketch of the figure on approximately 8.5 x 11" paper for these two, I painting over the sketches with my black, white, and grey paint. This is where I thought I resolved where I would be putting my black, white, and grey. I soon realized that trying to work out the black, white, and grey while the pieces were still small was ineffective. Therefore, after completing these two pieces, I started turning my sketches into more simple line drawings instead of painting them fully while they were still small-scale.

After turning the sketches into more defined drawings, I scanned them or took photographs. I put these images onto my computer and then projected them onto to the wall. While they were projected onto the wall, I moved the projector forwards and backwards to decide exactly how large my figure would be. As I was adjusting the projector, I pinned my paper to the wall and cut it to the approximate size of the projection. Sometimes the projection was a little too big for the paper, so I either adjusted the angle of the woman so she fit on the paper, or I moved the projector a little closer to make her fit. This projection process worked miracles for my work. This made the process so much quicker because instead of sketching my women full sized, I was able to draw them smaller where I could easily fix proportional errors. If I just drew straight on the large paper, it would take much longer to complete the drawing and it wouldn't look as good. With projection, I was able to focus on making a small, precise drawing and then blowing it up to trace so that I could focus the rest of my efforts on applying paint and making my women look magnificent and impressive.

For my first two pieces, because I used a resolved small-scale painting, I thought I would block out the areas that I wanted each shade to be and then it would be done. For both my guardians, I used this technique and the final pieces looked rather forced. The balance of black to white did not look as natural as it did on my drawing I was working off of, so I wound up painting back over most of what I had done on those figures. As I was painting over these figures, I made larger areas of grey, made the white highlights, and I made the black contour lines flow more smoothly. This change made the highlights on the bodies more selective so that the balance of black, white, and grey wasn't uniform throughout the piece.

My process started out very slowly but, as I got more practice with my techniques, I was able to produce my pieces more quickly. After my guardian figures, because I had figured out I didn't need too much information about the highlights in my small-scale drawing, I only worked with black line drawing. This line drawing focused on the outlines of the body and the outlines of the muscles that represented shadows. I projected the drawing onto the wall and used pencil to trace these black lines. I then went in with black paint and darkened these lines. After I darkened the lines, I had a large cup of grey paint that I mixed myself that I used to fill in the main spaces within the body. Once the body was filled in, I went over the area again to make sure the paint was nicely layered. After this process of applying grey paint, I went back into my figure with black paint and redefined the lines so that I had sharp edges, tapered lines, and didn't lose any small black lines during the application of my grey paint.

When finalizing these black lines, I looked at my reference photos and other pictures of the body to see where I thought muscles would look best on my character. I really focused on making these black lines very graphic and very specific to where shadows would be on the muscles of my women. Once my black lines were more finalized, I took my white paint and went

in with the highlights on the muscles. I had to go over these white pieces several times to make sure they were as opaque as I wanted them to be.

Once I was completely done with each of my figures, I left them on the full sheet of paper and hung them on the wall until I was done with the rest. After I completed my last painting, I took my figures out onto a big table with a cutting mat and an X-ACTO knife. I laid the pieces on the table and cut them out one by one. This part of the process was so satisfying because the blade cut through my paper so nicely and this meant that I was almost done with my body of work. The most challenging part of cutting the figures out was making sure that I didn't accidentally cut too far into my piece. On one occasion, I accidentally cut off a chunk of grass from one of the grounds underneath my figure. To resolve this mistake, I overlapped the pieces, taped the back of them together, and painted over the top to make it less noticeable. Because this was on the ground of a piece, it was not as huge of a mistake as it could have been and it was easily fixed.

Once all of my pieces were cut out and the gallery was empty from the last show, I was allowed to hang up my work. To hang the pieces, I knew I would be putting nails and screws all the way into the wall and then I would be putting my pieces on the wall between the nails and magnets. This method of hanging was advantageous because it allowed me to hang my pieces without putting any holes in them and damaging them. Because I knew this was the method I would be using, I needed to pre-plan exactly where I would be putting the magnets on the pieces. I planned out these spots by looking for places that needed the most support and looking for places that curled in the paper and would need magnets in order to lay down flat.

After planning on the places where I would want the magnets positioned, I taped my pieces to the wall. This taping served as a good temporary way to hang the work while I worked

out each piece's exact positioning. This allowed the work to be on the wall in relation to each of the other pieces. I was able to look at the space as a whole and make sure that everything was where I wanted it before I put the permanent nails in the wall. One of the challenges that I faced was creating a ground level for some of the pieces. I needed the pieces to be displayed in a way where they looked like they made sense height-wise in relationship to the others. For example, in my sitting guardians, I needed both of the women's seats to be around the same height so that they looked as if they were sitting on the same visual plane. At the same time, I also wanted them to look symmetrical, so their heads and feet were supposed to end at around the same heights. This is where my pre-planning of their similar sizes came in handy because they looked rather symmetrical on the wall without my doing too many adjustments. On the moveable walls on the other side of the guardians, I had my partial figures. I put them on these walls because they went together in size and design. This display allowed them to be opposite one another in the same way that my gatekeepers were.



Figure 14: *Gatekeeper 1* in progress of hanging



Figure 15: *Gatekeeper 2* in progress of hanging

I put *Explosion* out on its own wall. I did this because it was one of the widest pieces, so it would fill its own wall well. Additionally, because the woman had so much energy, she looked

like she was running across the wall. The most challenging wall to set up was the wall with *Down Start*, *Solidity*, and *Lunge*. These pieces were harder to arrange because two of them had positions where the figure was low to the ground and the other one was the tallest piece in the show. I eventually set a height of approximately 20 inches for the grounds of *Lunge* and *Down Start*. This allowed those figures to be high enough that enough of each piece was at eye level for the viewers of my exhibition and the rest of the piece was low enough that their poses made sense from a distance. *Solidity* was too tall for where I had set the ground level for the other two pieces on that wall, so I moved her down a little. Because she was the center of that wall and the other two pieces were symmetrically displayed to her side, it still made sense to have her at a different height.

After figuring out where everything was going to hang on the walls, I made pencil marks on the wall behind each of the pieces, marking out where I wanted the magnets to go. I took the pieces off the wall and, where each pencil mark was on the wall, I nailed or screwed into the wall until the hardware laid flat with the wall. Once all the nails and screws were in the wall, I was ready to hang my pieces up. I bought little round magnets and I spray painted them black so they would blend into my work. Rehangng everything on the wall was the last step and putting the magnets on was satisfyingly easy after all of the loud whirring of the power drill and the banging of the hammer.

When all the pieces were hung, I nailed my title piece to the wall, and used rubber cement to glue my labels and artist statement to the wall. This whole process of hanging everything in the gallery took a total of over 15 hours over the span of two nights. It was completely worth it though to have displayed my work in this manner though because the installation of a body of work can really change the meaning of a body of work.



## Exhibition

The display of my work is very important in some of the meaning of my work. In a shared gallery space, I was still able to apply my vision to the room. I took the movable walls in the gallery and moved them so that I could create my own little space in the gallery. This would make it so you could walk into another little room and see the pieces that I hung inside. I made the space large enough that one could back away from the piece and see it from afar, but I made it small enough that the walls were filled how I wanted them. On the outside of my space, I had my artist statement and two seated figures framing the entrance. These seated figures, titled *Gatekeeper 1* and *Gatekeeper 2*, served as the guardians of my display. I wanted these figures to be reminiscent of sculptures put on the outside of entrances to watch guests as they walk in. I made them with the vision of having them guard my exhibition, so for that reason, I made their bodies mirror each other in the way in which they are positioned.



Figure 16: Installation



Figure 17: Exhibition viewers

They are also almost the same exact size for that reason as well. These figures, unlike the ones you see when you walk inside, are not doing anything in particular. They are somewhat seductive, but they still look muscular and strong. This makes them evocative of the traditional female nude, but they are still confrontational and heroic in a way that does not totally contradict

the meaning of the rest of my work. Having these works on the outside is effective because if the viewer's mind does jump to the sexual, it makes the work on the inside a little more surprising. The viewer may be expecting to see nude women reclined, sexualized, and lying around in the space but instead, the women are explosive and powerful. The work inside is so explicitly about what the female body can do athletically that the thoughts of sexuality disappear and you are more impressed by the strength of the women.

I created many of the pieces with the intention of hanging them in the gallery space with each other. Two of the pieces, *Solidity* and *Explosion*, were meant to stand on their own as pieces, either on their own walls or framed by the rest of the works. The other six pieces were made in pairs so that they could be hung on either side of each other in the gallery.

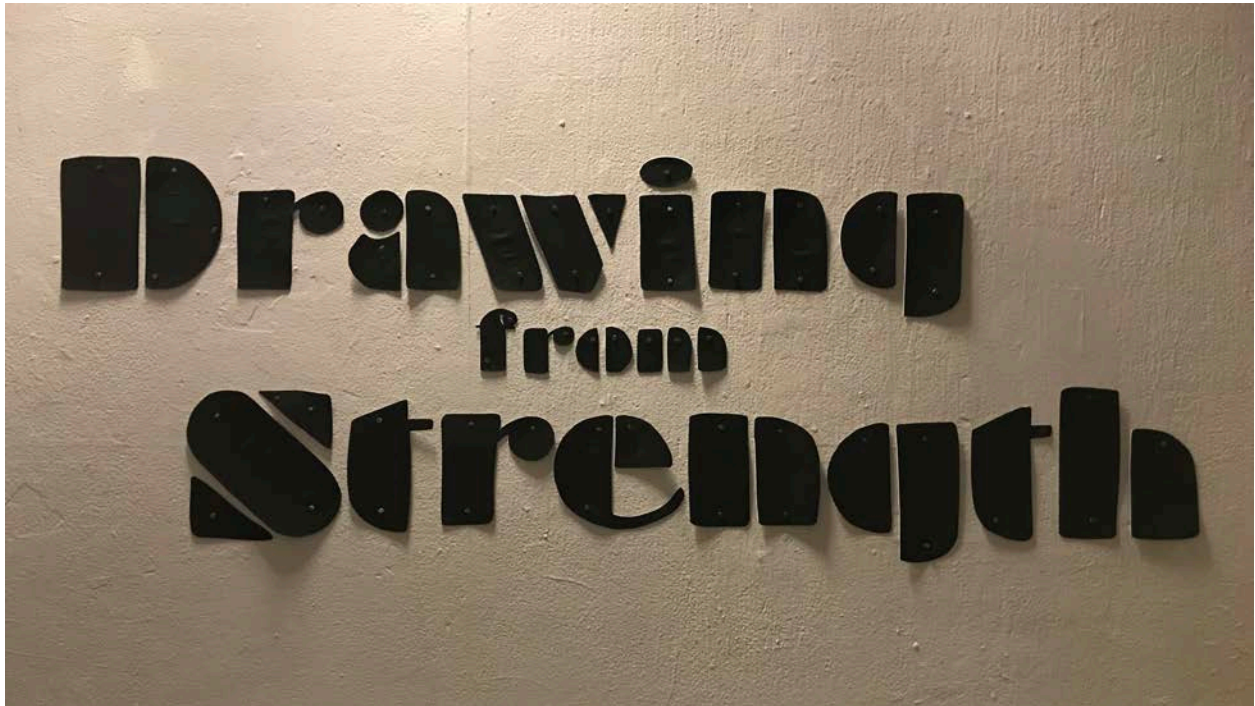
### **Reflection**

Overall, I was very happy with the work I produced. Over the two-year time span, I grew as an artist and was able to analyze and interpret my old work in a way that helped me to figure out what I really wanted to do with my final body of work for my exhibition. I was able to identify a few major influences, mainly classical sculpture and comic book art, and I was able to take my favorite elements of these influences to make a body of work that fused those elements.

As I was creating my work in the beginning, the paper I was using was less than ideal. As a result, I switched the paper I was using to a more durable paper. If I were to do something differently, I would redo those beginning pieces to make them more successful and to paint them on the more durable Yupo paper. Another thing I would do differently would be to make my guardian figures a little more sexualized or a little less sexualized. They were somewhat in the middle, so some viewers were a little confused about why they were a little sexualized. Making

them less sexualized would make them match the women in the room better, making my point about strength as beauty more obvious. Making them more sexualized would exaggerate the difference between the women on the inside of my space and the outside. This would be a little more controversial, but it would increase the shock of the viewer when walking into my space for the first time and seeing my non-sexualized, powerful, athletic women on the inside. Other than that, I think I can grow with this body of work. It was very well received by almost everyone who spoke to me about it, so if I wanted to continue creating more pieces, I could do so. I have more than enough source and reference material and I truly love the style that I've worked in. Working large and cutting my figures out is really wonderful for me because then my pieces remind me so much of the classical sculpture that I love.

The ideas represented by this body of work are very important to me. The female athletic nude body is so amazing and I believe it has not been represented enough in our visual culture. I want to show strength in the women I depict and I want them to be heroic for all the girls who have ever been told that they cannot be strong. I have been an athlete my entire life and I've always looked at myself in the mirror and been inspired by my own body. I see my muscles and the muscles of my teammates and want to paint them because they're so beautiful. Above all, when I look at my paintings, I see myself in them and it makes me feel confident and powerful.

**Work**

*Drawing From Strength Title Piece, Acrylic on Paper*

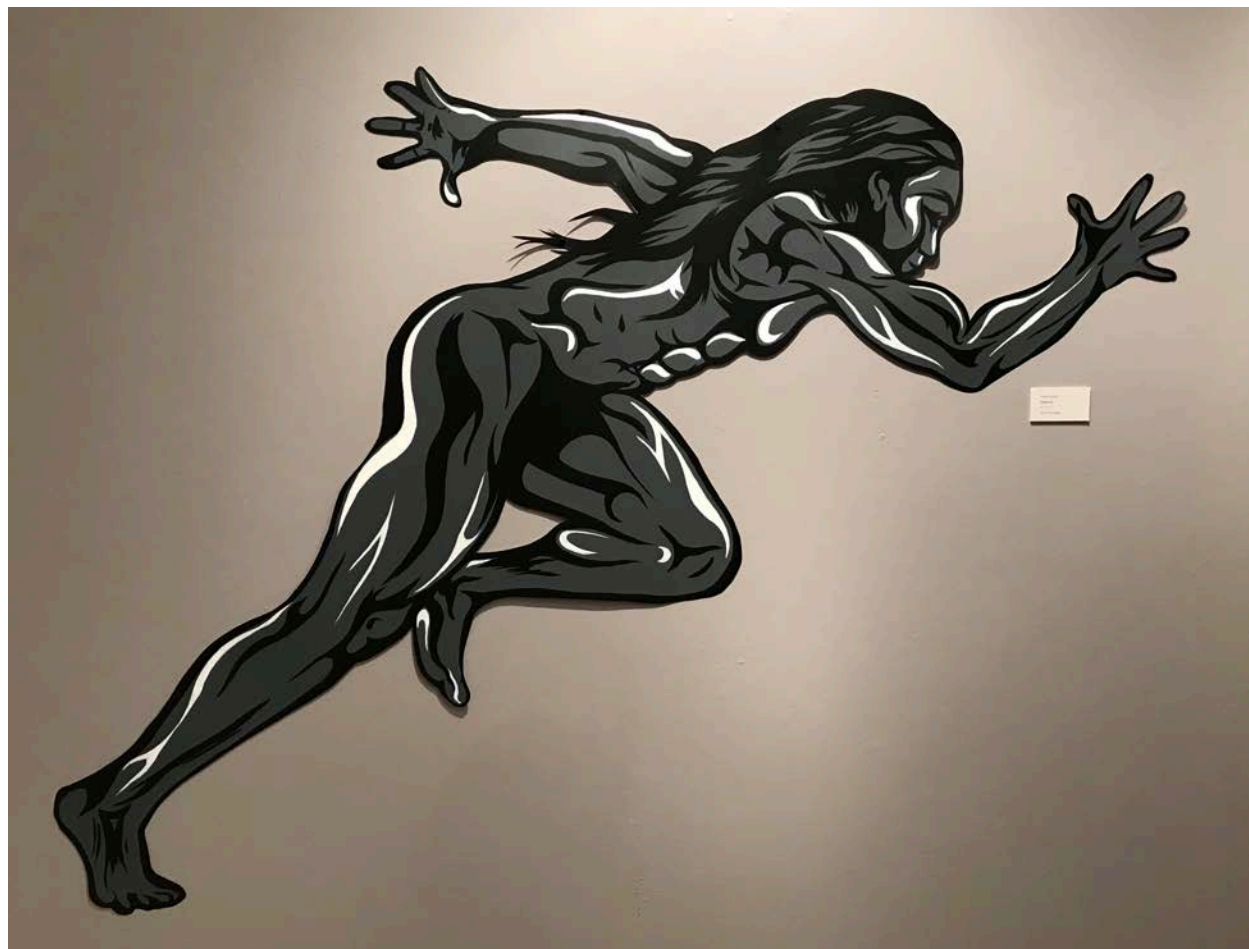


*Gatekeeper 1, Acrylic on Paper, 50" x 79"*



*Gatekeeper 2, Acrylic on Paper, 65" x 79 ½"*



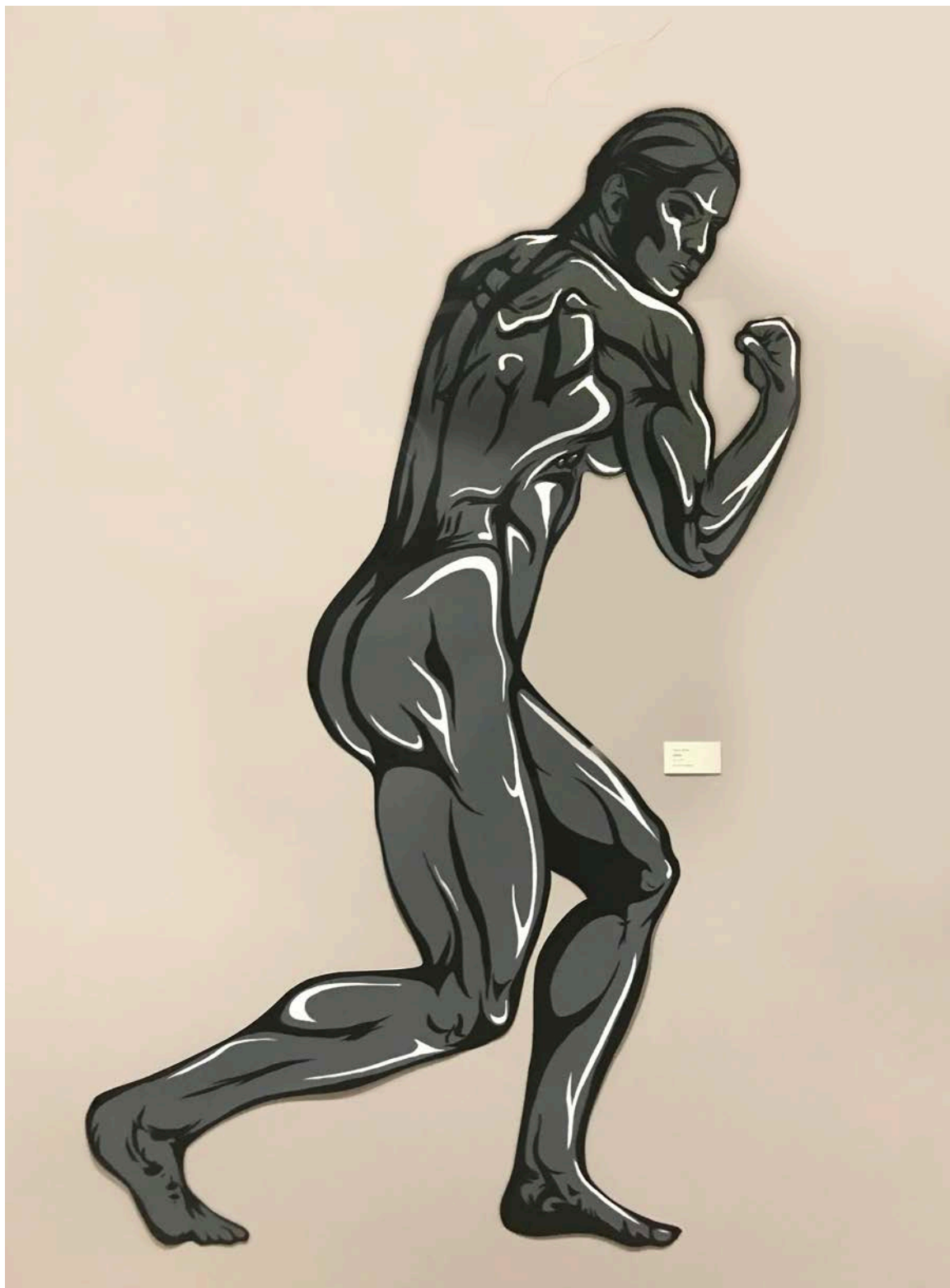


*Explosion, Acrylic on Paper, 81" x 52"*

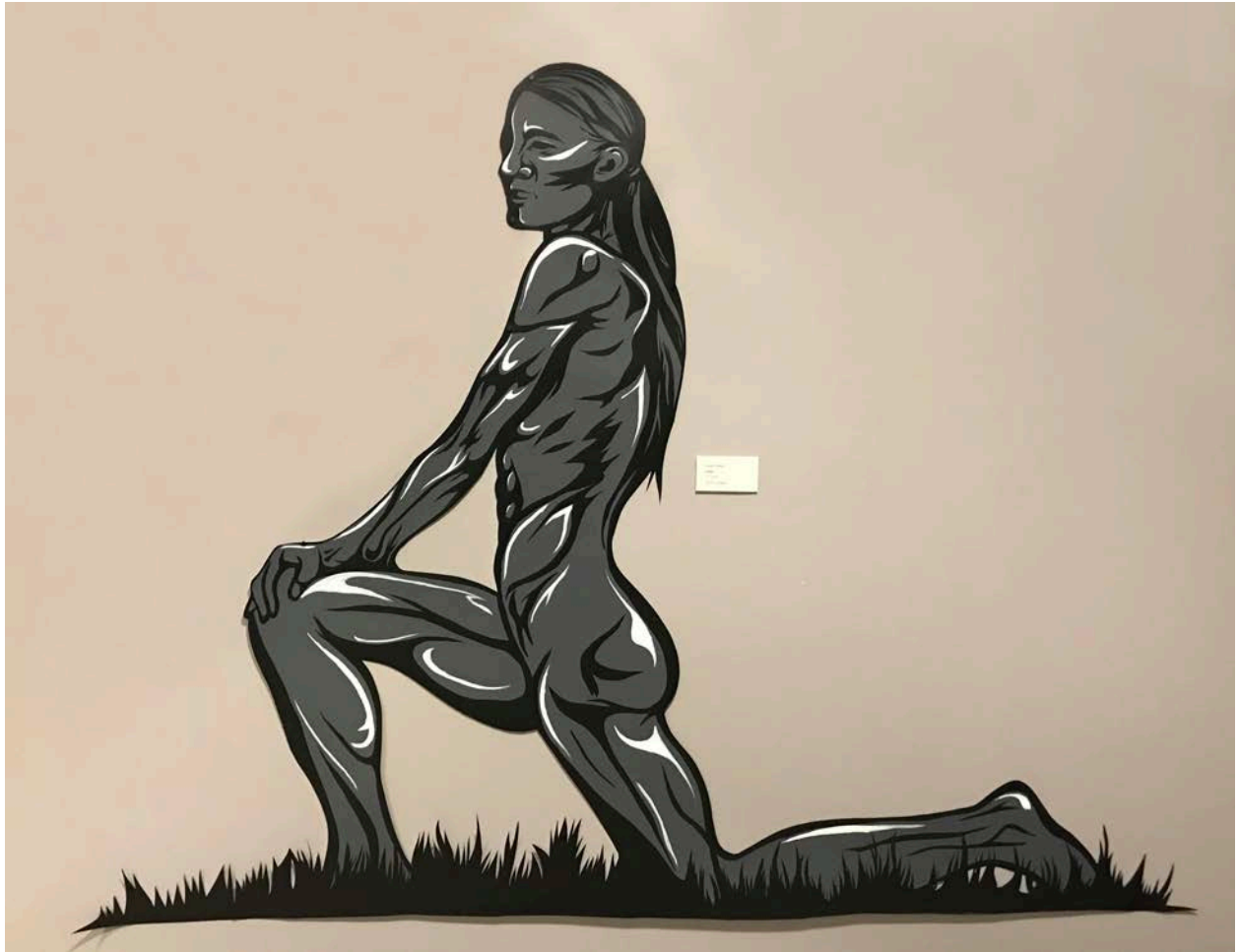


*Down Start, Acrylic on Paper, 81" x 41 ½ "*

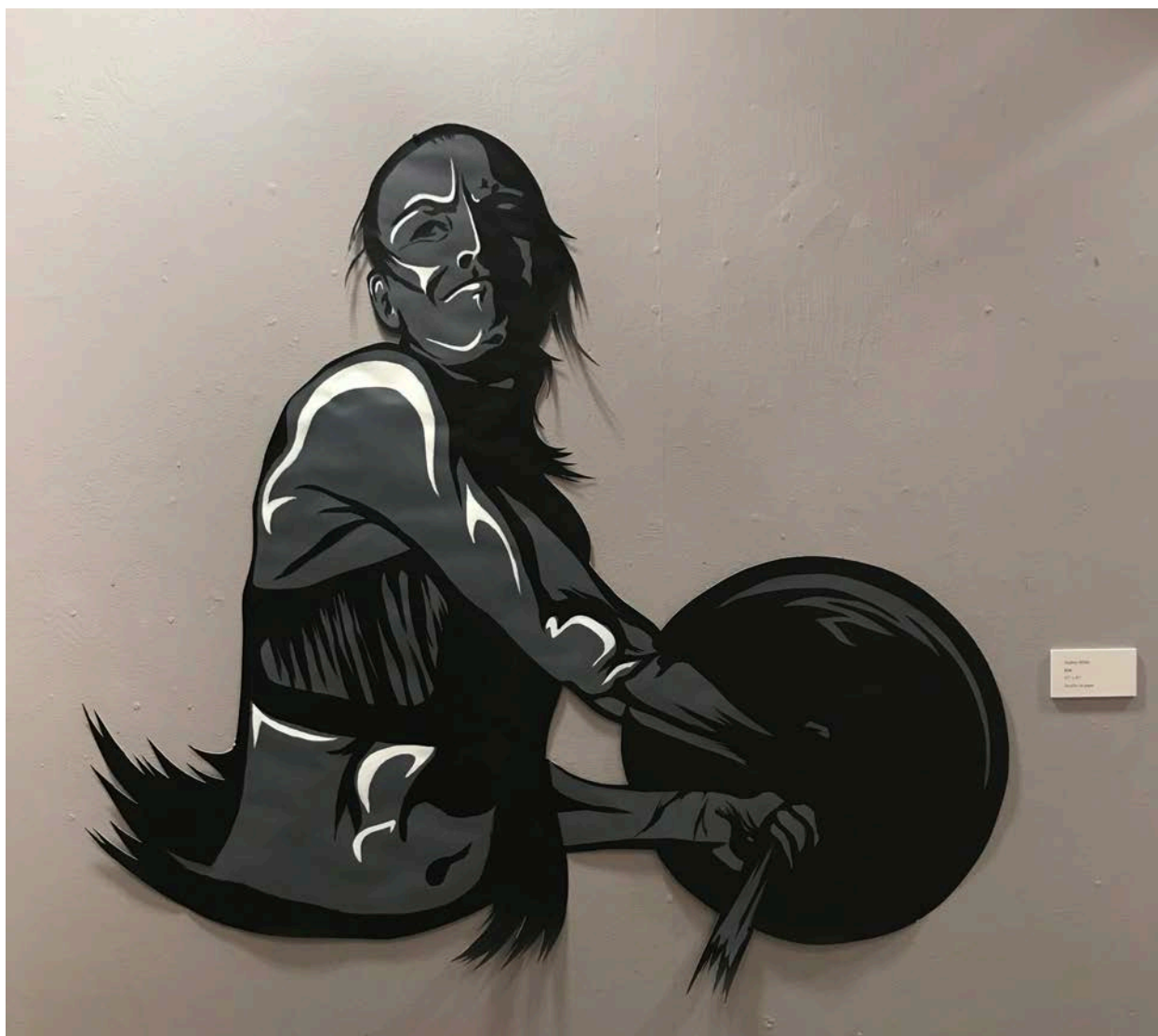




*Solidity, Acrylic on Paper, 56" x 87"*



*Lunge*, Acrylic on Paper, 77" x 59"



*Grit*, Acrylic on Paper, 45" x 45"



*Force*, Acrylic on Paper, 37 ½ " x 38"